

ART. XXI.—*Discovery of Ancient Brāhmi Script in Kashmir.*

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(Read 17th December 1903.)

I have the pleasure of announcing to this Society my discovery in Srinagar, Kashmir, of short inscriptions in the ancient Brāhmi, or Aśoka script, dating about 150 B.C., the first of their kind ever brought to light in that country. The importance of this discovery will at once be realized by all Indian archæologists.

On the 22nd of June 1903, as I was leaving Srinagar, and floating down the Jhelum, I remembered that I had neglected to visit the tomb of Zainu-l-ābidin, just below the fourth bridge. Our boats were therefore moored at the landing, and the ruins examined. My eye at once fell on an inscription of four letters in the ancient Brāhmi script, on the right wall of the entrance gate to Zainu-l-ābidin's tomb. Closer examination revealed other short inscriptions of three letters each. Continuing my search to the East entrance gate of the enclosure to Zainu-l-ābidin's mother's tomb, I found both the right and left entrance walls had letters on them in the same Brāhmi script. There were also other letters of a more modern type. As these inscriptions are very plain to the sight, it is difficult to account for the fact that their existence has escaped the notice of the archæologists who have visited these ruins, and who would have at once recognized their importance. These ruins were visited and described by Cunningham (see J., R. A. S., Bengal, 1848, page 241 and following). They were photographed by Lieut. H. H. Cole in 1868 (see *Illustrations of Ancient Buildings in Kashmir*, by Henry Hardy Cole, Lieut., R.E., page 15). In 1865, Rev. W. G. Cowie, Chaplain on duty in Kashmir, made a study of Kashmir temples and described those omitted by Cunningham. (See *Notes on Some of the Temples of Kashmir* by W. G. Cowie in J., R. A. S., Bengal, 1866, Part 1, page 91). Mr. Cowie makes no mention of these ruins, though it is hardly likely that he did not visit them. In 1875, Dr. Geo. Bühler visited Kashmir in search of Sanskrit manuscripts (see his report in the J., R. A. S., Bombay, Extra number, 1877), but he does not mention these ruins, and perhaps did not visit them. Dr. M. A. Stein visited Kashmir in 1888, 1889, 1895, 1896, 1898 for the archæological study of that country in connection with his great work on the *Rājatarangani*, but these inscriptions escaped his notice. There have, of course, been many other visitors to these ruins, but either these inscriptions have not been noticed, or, if noticed, none have realized their importance sufficiently to make their existence public.

I have here to express my deep regret that my discovery of these inscriptions was at a time when I felt I had not an hour to spare to take squeezes, and otherwise secure materials for their proper study, all arrangements having been completed for leaving Baramulla the next day. I had, therefore, to reluctantly continue my journey. My regret however is less keen from the fact that the content of the inscriptions is doubtless of little consequence as compared with the discovery of the fact that the form of the letters are the ancient Brāhmi script of about 150 B. C. This proves that that script was anciently used in Kashmir, and also gives evidence as to the early date of the ruins on which the letters are inscribed. A hasty pencil copy of the letters on the gateway to Zainu-l-ābidin's tomb, and a photograph of the left wall of the gateway to the enclosure of Zainu-l-ābidin's mother's tomb, was all I had time to obtain to carry away for study. I trust, however, that these gateways will now be carefully examined, and facts to be learned be more certainly determined than can be done from the data supplied by my single hour's investigation, and my rough copies of these inscriptions.

I have assumed that the form of the letters indicates a date about 150 B. C., but I think that it would be safer to say that the letters in these inscriptions are too few in number to make one sure within a century or two, since they happen to be letters that in the history of alphabetic development kept their original form the longest. And again, as this is the first discovery of this script in Kashmir, we are as yet without data as to the history of alphabetic development in Kashmir itself as distinguished from the alphabetic development in India. These two considerations should for the present leave deductions from the form of these letters open to further light.

THE INSCRIPTIONS.

1. On the panel under the pediment of the left wall of the gateway leading into the enclosure of Zainu-l-ābidin's mother's tomb, are three letters, *de sā ka*, I am not able to conjecture what the meaning may be. It does not look as though these letters were a part of a longer inscription; and yet there are faint traces of a possible line above in a smaller hand.¹

2. On the same side wall, to the right of the upper angle of the pediment, is another inscription of three letters. I had depended on my Kodak to preserve a record of this inscription, as it was very distinct. Unfortunately in my photograph the first letter of the inscription is partially hidden behind the upper angle of the pediment. The

¹Prof. Bendal has suggested the possibility of the reading being *de-sa-ka*, "preacher."

other two letters are *sā kka*, or possibly *sā ko*. The first letter does not seem to be *de*, as in the inscription mentioned above. One is naturally tempted as a trial to conjecture *Sākka*, the Pali for *Sākya*.¹

3. There are detached letters on other parts of this wall apparently also in the same script, and others again in, I think, a later script.

4. On the right hand wall there are also detached letters of apparently a later date.

5. On the entrance gate to Zainu-l-ābidin's tomb, on the right wall, and to the right of the upper angle of the pediment, is an inscription with the following consonants *th. b. k. t*. The vowel marks were not distinct enough to my eye to make me feel sure what were the original, and what have come from the accidents of time. With the exception of the first letter *th* the same inscription seems to occur in two other places; one on the pilaster to the right of the pediment, and the other a little below this second inscription. On account of this uncertainty of vowel marks I cannot definitely decide what the words may be. I conjecture however the Pali words *Thubo kato*, in Sanscrit स्थूपः कृतः "made the Stupa."²

IMPORTANCE OF THE DISCOVERY.

The oldest script hitherto found in Kashmir has been on the coins of Toramāna and Pravarasena, and on a fragment of Didda Rani's time (980—1004 A.D.), (now in the Lahore Museum), all in the Gupta character. All other specimens of ancient script are in the later Śarada character. My discovery therefore of the Brāhmi Script on these ruined gateways establishes the fact that the Brāhmi or Aśoka script was also in use in Kashmir, as was suspected, but the evidence of which has hitherto been wanting.³

Secondly.—The importance of this discovery lies in the fact that it settles the approximate date of these gateways. They may for the present be considered the oldest architectural ruins in Kashmir, about 150 B. C. It is interesting to note that Cunningham (*see J., R. A. S.*,

¹ In Professor C. Bendal's inaugural address, Oct. 30th, 1903, on Aims and Methods of Recent Indian Research, he mentions the interesting fact of the discovery of an image of Buddha of the 1st century A.D. with the Greek legends *Βοδδo* and *Σακκα*.

² By the use of a magnifying glass these letters can be easily seen in Cole's photograph No. 5.68, to the right of the upper angle of the upper pediment, and on the pilaster to the right. Cole's photograph 4.68 is of the right side of the gateway to the enclosure of Zainu-l-ābidin's mother's tomb. There are only detached letters on this side wall.

³ See Dr. Geo. Bühler's Report, J., R. A. S., Bombay, 1877. On page 31, he says:—

"The Sharada characters now in use appear first on the coins of Arantivarman (845—884 A.D.). The older coins of Toramana and Pravarasena show pure Gupta characters. They recur also in all Kashmir inscriptions which have been found, the oldest among which is probably the fragment of the time of Didda Rani (980—1004 A.D.) preserved in the Lahore Museum."

Bengal, 1848) on purely architectural grounds regarded the gateway into the enclosure of Zainu-l-ābidin's tomb, together with the enclosing wall as a little later than the original temple on the Takht-i-Sulaiman which he dated 200 B. C. Cole (see Notes on Ancient Buildings in Kashmir, by Lieut. Cole 1868) following Cunningham, dates these gateways 400 A.D. Fergusson (*see History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*,¹ page 281) disputes this early date of Cunningham on the ground that both enclosing walls, namely, that of the Takht-i-Sulaiman and that of Zainu-l-ābidin's tomb, are of very late date, not earlier than 1416 A.D. He also concludes from descriptions and photographs, that the gateways of the enclosures is of the same age as the enclosing walls.

It is evident however from my discovery that both Fergusson and Cunningham are mistaken as to the age of the gateways, though Cunningham is much nearer right. The enclosing wall may perhaps be of modern date, and built by Zainu-l-ābidin or later, as Fergusson suggests, since the using of old Hindu temples in Mahomedan buildings is common throughout Kashmir. The question of the age of the enclosing wall I must leave to those who have more expert knowledge in the history of architectural development. But the inscriptions leave little room for doubt that the gateways I have described belong to a period B.C. and furnish us with a fixed starting point for the study of the development of Kashmir architecture. There is no reason to

¹ History of Indian and Eastern Architecture by Fergusson, page 281. "The first and most misleading mistake that has been made with reference to Kashmiri Architecture, was the assumption by General Cunningham that the enclosure to Zein-ul-abud-din's tomb in Srinagar originally belonged to an ancient Kashmiri temple. Lieutenant Cole boldly prints on his plates, "probable date A. D. 400 to 500." A mistake as nearly as may be of 1,000 years, as it is hardly doubtful that it was erected for or by the prince whose name it bears, and who, in A. D. 1416, succeeded his father Shikandar, who bore the ill-omened nickname of Bhutshikan, the idol breaker. As will be seen from the woodcut (No. 156), it consists of a series of small pointed arches in rectangular frames, such as are very frequently found in Mahomedan art, and the peculiarities of the gateways and other parts are just such as are found in all contemporary Moslem art in India. All the mosques and tombs, for instance, at Ahmedabad, A. D. 1396-1572, are made up of details borrowed from the architecture of the Jains, and the bases of their minarets and their internal pillars can only be distinguished from those of the heathen by their position, and by the substitution of foliage for human figures in the niches or places where the Hindus would have introduced images of their gods.

In this instance there is no incongruity, no borrowed features; every stone was carved for the place where it is found. There are niches it is true on each side of the gateway, like those found at Martand and other pagan temples; but like those at Ahmedabad they are without images, and the arch in brick which surmounts this gateway is a radiating arch, which appears certainly to be integral, but, if so, could not possibly be erected by a Hindu. When General Cunningham visited the valley in 1848, he was not so familiar as he has since become with the ruins of Gour, Juanpore, Ahmedabad, and other Moslem cities where the architectural forms adopted by the Moslems are with difficulty distinguished from those of the Hindus. With the knowledge we now possess it is not likely that any one can mistake the fact that this enclosure was erected by the prince whose name it bears to surround his tomb, in the Mahomedan cemetery of the city in which it is found."

suppose that the radiating arch of brick was an integral part of the original gateway as Fergusson assumes. These late brick arches to old Hindu gateways are to be frequently seen in Srinagar. Had Fergusson used his magnifying-glass on Cole's photograph No. 568 he would have been saved the blunder of condemning Cunningham's conclusions drawn from architectural considerations which he had gained from observation on the spot. These ancient letters are very plain in Cole's photograph, when once attention is called to them. Fergusson regards the temple at Martand as the oldest known specimen of Hindu architecture in Kashmir, about 700 A.D., my discovery therefore now puts back the date of the oldest known remains in Kashmir to about eight centuries earlier, and brings us nearer the point of the connection with the Greek influence, which is noticed in Kashmir ancient architecture.

Thirdly.—My discovery of the Brāhmi script, establishing its use in Kashmir, makes it almost certain that a careful search would be rewarded by the discovery of other inscriptions in that script, which might throw much needed light on the most ancient period of that country's history. Ancient ruins are abundant. Stones that have an ancient look are frequently seen, and in Srinagar are in great abundance. One cannot but think that a careful search by eyes trained to detect inscriptions would be certainly fruitful. That inscribing on stone was not only an ancient custom, but abundantly employed, we have also reason to believe from Kalhana's statement, that in writing his great history of Kashmir, the *Rājatarangani*, he made use of old inscriptions. His statement in I. 15 is as follows :—

"By looking at the inscriptions recording the consecration of temples, and grants by former kings, at the laudatory inscriptions, and at written works, the trouble arising from many errors has been overcome."¹

¹ To this text of Kalhanas I. 15, Dr. Stein adds the following note:—"In the note appended to the translation reproduced above Prof. Bühler rightly distinguishes four kinds of records as referred to by K. (1) The Pratishāśana edicts, i.e., inscriptions recording the erection and consecration of temples or other buildings and monuments, such as are to be found on almost all temples, religious or even profane buildings (such as palaces), on images, funeral monuments, and so forth; (2) the Vastuśāśana edicts, i.e., inscriptions regarding grants of things, chiefly of land, and, perhaps, also of allowances, such as are found engraved on copper-plates; (3) Prāśastipattas, tables containing laudatory inscriptions of persons or places, such as now are found sometimes in temples or other public buildings (regarding such inscriptions, comp. now Prof. Bühler's remarks in the Vienna Oriental Journal, Vol. II. p. 80); (4) the Sastras, the works on the various sciences, or, to use a short expression, the manuscripts of Sanscrit Books, which in Kashmir mostly give at the end some information regarding the author and the King under whom the author wrote, together with the date.

"Of the first class of documents only a small number of specimens has been found in Kashmir, and none of them, except a fragmentary inscription of the time of Queen Didda in the Lahore Museum, can be ascribed with certainty to a period earlier than K. For some brief undated inscriptions of this kind, seen by Prof. Bühler at Khunamuh and Varahamula, comp. Report, pp. 6, 12. Others of a similar character have been found by me at Vijabror, Bavan (Martand) and a few other places. It is likely that K obtained a portion of the ample data his work contains as to the foundation of particular temples, Mathas, Viharas, and other religious buildings, from such inscriptional records.

"No inscription of the kind described under (2) and (3) has come to my knowledge in Kashmir. That inscriptions, probably on copper-plates, were used for the record of land-grants also in Kashmir, we see from the story of Ranga related v. 397 sq."

This statement is so clear that the existence of many inscriptions in his day must be assumed, and doubtless many still exist, hidden in the earth, or built into Mahomedan buildings. Perhaps many are lying open to the sight, but yet unnoticed by archæologists. I would like therefore to throw out the suggestion that it might not be out of the province of this Society to encourage in some practical way the work of exploration in Kashmir with the special purpose of finding inscriptions. Prof. Bühler was sent to Kashmir to find Sanscrit MSS. and all know of his great success. Prof. Stein was sent to Kashmir in connection with the study of the *Rājatarangani*, and the identification of its mentioned places, and accomplished a great and lasting work. No one has yet however been sent to Kashmir with the special purpose of hunting for inscriptions. There is therefore a well defined opportunity for valuable contributions to be made to our knowledge of ancient Kashmir, if a careful search should be made for the inscriptions of that interesting country.

